Biddulph G-3 (1873-1878) 1880 All Afghanistan ACC
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CHAPTER II.

GILGIT—HUNZA—NAGER—PONYAL.

CLOSE above Gor the traveller leaves Yaghestan and reaches Cashmere territory. On the left bank is the extensive Astor Valley, of which so good a description has already been given by Mr. Drew. Twelve miles below the point at which the Indus, after a north-westerly course of nearly 500 miles, turns between precipitous rocks abruptly to the south, is Boonji, the name of which has been converted by the Sikhs and Dogras into Bawanji. This was at one time a flourishing settlement, and is said to have contained eight forts, which would represent a population of between 2,000 and 3,000 souls. Its prosperity began to decline under the influence of the wars undertaken at the beginning of the present century by the rulers of Yassin and Chitral, which finally led to the Sikh occupation of Gilgit. In 1841 Boonji only contained 200 houses, and it was then finally ruined by the disastrous flood, of which Mr. Drew gives so interesting and able an explanation. The water-courses, on which the prosperity of such alluvial spots entirely depends, were swept away, and the amount of labour and expense necessary for their repair are beyond the power of a small village community. The Cashmere Government has lately taken them in hand, with a view to encouraging the resettling of the place, which at present only contains a colony of convict horse-stealers and a small garrison.

Immediately opposite Boonji is the narrow but fertile Sai Valley. Six miles further up, the Gilgit river falls into the Indus. The lower part of the valley of this river, nearly 40 miles in length, forms the Gilgit district. Gilgit itself, situated 24 miles from the Indus, at an elevation of 4,890 feet, combines the advantages of a good climate, a considerable extent of fertile land, and a central position, and appears from ancient times to have been the seat of a succession of rulers who, to a greater or less degree, exercised authority over the surrounding valleys and states.

4: Durand G-3 (1888-93) 1900 AV1 Kashmir
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491 rope, swaying in the wind, and facing the cold air which rushes down above the centre of these ice-fed torrents. In order to prevent the side-ropes getting close together they are kept apart by sticks inserted at every few yards, over which you have to step. This is rather an acrobatic performance, as in the middle of the bridge the side ropes are two-and-a-half to three feet above the foot rope, but you soon get used to it. Every one crosses these bridges, old women, children, men carrying any loads, alive or dead. Some dogs negotiate them quite easily, but many get frightened and lie down half way and have to be picked up. We had one pariah, who followed us from Kashmir, drowned, alas! three years afterwards in the Indus, who always tried to walk over the rope bridge, and invariably fell into the water when half way over. He did not try the Shaitan Nara: nothing that fell into that boiling torrent could come out alive.

312 From Ramghat the road runs for eight miles over
133 an open sloping plain bordering the Indus to Bunji.
• 731 This plain extends north for another ten miles, and is reported to have been richly cultivated, to have been partially ruined during the numerous wars at the beginning of the century, and to have had its devastation completed by the great flood in 1841. This was caused by a gigantic landslip, probably following an earthquake. The whole hillside facing the Indus, just above the Lechur nullah, from a height of about four thousand feet above the river, was precipitated into the valley below, impinging on the opposite bank, and bringing down on that side a secondary hill-fall. The course of the river was completely

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arrested by a huge dam thousands of feet thick and some hundreds high; the water must have risen at the dam to fully a thousand feet above its present level. Whatever may have been the ordinary level then, the Bunji plain was converted into a lake, and the Gilgit river, which runs into the Indus six miles above Bunji, was dammed up for thirty miles to just below the present fort of Gilgit. The tradition is that the dam held for months, and that, when it began to cut, the river completed its work in one day, and swept down in a solid wall of water carrying all before it. All down the Indus valley to the plains the people were of course prepared for the rush, and though miles of cultivated land were ruined, one does not hear of much loss of life. But where the river begins to open out into the plains of India near Attock, a great disaster occurred. A portion of the Sikh army was encamped practically in the river-bed, and the flood caught it and swept it away. In the picturesque native description it is said: "As an old woman with a wet cloth sweeps away an army of ants, so the river swept away the army of the Maharaja." All down the Indus valley ruined village lands covered with sand still attest the violence of the flood. You pass through a mile or more of the great dam, a mass of crumpled and distorted hillocks, on the road by the left bank of the Indus to Chilas; and the remains of a great pile of drift-wood left by the flood, which had for fifty years formed an inexhaustible supply of firewood for every traveller, shepherd, shikari, or raider who had passed that way, was still to be seen a year or two ago.

4: Durand G-3 (1888-93) 1900 AV1 Kashmir
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133 bullock skins. It was a most exhilarating perform-
501 ance; once you had pushed out from the shore and began rowing, the raft was caught in the stream, and went dancing madly down, tossed in all directions by the waves, the men pulling for their lives so as to avoid being swept past the landing-place and through the heavy rapids below. A few minutes of racing down-stream, and you pulled into quieter water on the opposite side, some hundreds of yards lower down than you started. All our kit, guard, etc., crossed in the boats, a much more dangerous performance, unless most carefully watched, for the Kashmir officials had never realised that the flat-bottomed boats, suitable to the navigation of the Woollar Lake, and of the quiet upper reaches of the Jhelum, were not fitted to the roaring stream
[731] of the Indus in flood. Consequently, year by year, they continued to build slab-sided flat-bottomed boats, and to man them with unfortunate impressed Kashmiri boatmen, accustomed to use a futile heart-shaped paddle instead of an oar; the natural result was that every year, as a rule, there was a disaster, and twenty to thirty men drowned. The local officials did not even trouble to select the best place for a ferry; there were far better places a little up the stream. A Kashmir officer, while the arrangements for crossing were being made, explained to us the advantages of the rafts, and thoughtfully remarked: "The boat is very dangerous; we will not go in it ourselves, but send the coolies and guard." I crossed often afterwards by boat, but it was most unpleasant, and with a lot of men and horses
000 in it, really unsafe. There were the usual casualties